



## 2024 Mission-Based Compact Between the Commonwealth of Australia and Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education

### Purpose

This compact is an agreement between the Commonwealth and the University. Entering into a Compact is one of the quality and accountability requirements, which a higher education provider must meet under the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* (HESA) as a condition of receiving a grant. Specifically, subsection 19-110(1) of HESA requires that Table A and Table B providers must, in respect of each year for which a grant is paid to the provider under HESA, enter into a Mission-Based Compact with the Commonwealth for a period that includes that year.

All strategies should provide qualitative and/or quantitative measures of assessment.

## Mission and Strategic Planning

### **OUR MISSION - We educate to liberate.**

As a specialist institute and the only First Nations dual sector tertiary education provider in Australia, Batchelor Institute serves a unique role in providing education, training programs and courses for First Nations Peoples. Council determines our vision as being the education provider of choice for First Nations people. The Institute has just updated its [Strategic Plan 2020-2024](#) and is currently updating its [Research Plan](#).

The primary measures of success in our Institution reflect First Nations expectations of an Australian Higher Education system which is underpinned by First Nations led and Indigenous Knowledge driven approaches, responses, and measures of success. In taking that position we also differentiate ourselves because we come from and retain the connected cultural knowledge practices embedded in our First Nations language, culture, and country. Our Graduate School growth, including alumni, is a consistent measure of success and a demonstration of our core underpinning approach to strength based and enabling higher education in which First Nations people can see themselves and are heard. The success of this approach to Higher Education can be attested to by the professional standing of our alumni, including by the many leaderships and senior academic roles they have attained across university and industry sectors in Australia.

Sector challenges that are addressed through our underpinning approach include:

- Artificial intelligence and contract cheating are not as influential on our operations as they are in a mainstream university. The focus on hard skills has seen vulnerabilities arise, however our cohort and programs typically fall in the soft skills area and are much harder to duplicate. Our staff are aware of the issues in the mainstream, and we address them in our provision of Higher Education through ensuring the roles and responsibilities that candidates have to their community and the relationship of Indigenous Community Intellectual Property, and/or own Intellectual Property. Batchelor Institute has always recognised the output of Higher Education Candidates intellectual property is held by the candidate, or through a compact of community and candidate. The Institute will be developing a plan in response to TEQSA's request that addresses AI as an issue that teaching staff will incorporate into their delivery.
- Batchelor Institute Cyber Security uplift strategy is based on the zero-trust mindset framework with a heavy focus on compliance. Batchelor Institute as of 2024 is a member of CAUDIT and delegates attend regular cyber security briefings.
- Academic integrity risks has been addressed by the recent Academic and Corporate Governance Review conducted by the Wells Advisory group, now Minter Ellison.

In relation to other sector risks:

- there is no casualisation risk, which is an issue across the wider higher education sector, within the Institute.
- changes to the international student market does not impact the Institute, which currently is not CRICOS registered and therefore has no international student delivery.
- our student load is relatively stable and therefore, the impact of fluctuating student load through attrition on the Institute's finances is not relevant.

The Institute has developed an Academic Freedom Policy, see attached. The Institute has recently undergone a quality assurance exercise, TEQSA reregistration, and ICAC review two years ago and is undergoing and has undergone significant policy development process.

## Strategies for Improving Equality of Opportunity in Higher Education

Batchelor Institute's main constituency originates from remote or very remote Northern Territory communities. However, our Graduate School attracts candidates from around the country. The reason for our existence is to provide learning opportunities for those who have historically faced many barriers to education. Distance and literacy are two of the major barriers.

The Institute is responding to issue of distance by provision of a mixed mode of learning and a strong Away From Base (AFB) residential and reverse block model of delivery. Masterclasses are held twice a year, with Candidates encouraged and supported to attend in person where possible. Masterclasses help to reduce isolation of Candidates and assists in building professional networks.

The inclusion of a Graduate School Candidate Liaison Officer funded entirely out of our ISSP allocation means that HDR students and candidates have representation on committees and a champion and advocate and first port-of-call support. Communication is key to the attraction and retention of students, many of whom speak an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander language in their home community and in their workplace. Interpretation and communication skills are particularly relevant to the role of the Candidate Liaison Officer.

We are aware of the issues of digital inclusion which affect many remote communities and work diligently to assist candidates to overcome basic connectivity challenges through provision of laptops and sim cards.

To address literacy barriers, we have applied for funding from the Commonwealth for a National Centre for First Nations Language and Literacy recognising first languages as critical for the health of the country and wellbeing of families, and literacy as critical for engagement in workforces and higher education.

We will offer a functional English literacy, numeracy, and digital program to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from around the nation from pre certificate 1 to first year university. We are currently developing a program that provides a non-linear approach to increasing skills in functional literacy and learning. Dubbed 'functional' for the focus on practical, applicable, context-driven learning objectives, the approach can support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, institutions, organisations, or communities nationally, whether urban, remote or regional. There is no fixed entry or exit pathway and a learner might repeat the same level multiple times, pursuing a range of functional outcomes or consolidating them. The program is mapped to the Certificate II in General Education (Victoria University) which can provide exit points and a nationally recognised qualification if needed. However, the teaching program will be circular and will offer support from pre certificate one up to first year undergraduate.

## Strategies for Improving Teaching and Learning

The future Teaching and Learning Plan 2024-2028 is premised on 4 key learning approaches, the current [Teaching and Learning Plan](#) and the [MK Turner Report](#). Academic Board is starting the process of updating the teaching and learning plan, knowing that Our Culture is Our Strength. The [Strategic Plan 2022 – 2024](#) acknowledges this. The Institute’s teaching, research and problem-solving take into account the challenges and opportunities for First Nations peoples, and are based on their priorities, perspectives and ways of knowing.

The hybrid approach to strengthen the HDR program is a core to Graduate School practice. We pride ourselves on being an exclusively culturally safe and accessible environment for First Nations scholars, Elders and academics. The inclusion of face-to-face learning, peer and cultural activities underpin how we deliver on this belief and approach. The design and offering of the Research Training Program both online and in face-to-face peer, and supervisory delivery is core to the record of candidate success through our attuned cultural program.

The program is augmented by a network of First Nations academics from around the nation who support our hybrid learning with online and face to face participation at Masterclasses, and through being delegated to panels for Supervision and for Confirmation of Candidature milestones. The process is vibrant, but there is risk associated with deep reliance on external specialists and so our planning for the program will concentrate on widening sources of research learning and opportunity for Candidates to develop through Industry (internships or placements), International Indigenous academic participation in supervision, and through encouraging Candidates to grow their own professional networks.

We have a curriculum developed for a post Graduate Certificate in First Nations Positionalities providing an alternative entrance and exit point to the Master’s program and an upskilling opportunity for professional and paraprofessional people. The Graduate Certificate will introduce research and evaluative thinking within the context of First Nations led practice and inquiry. It will be a pathway for professional and paraprofessionals, or for higher education. Because of the strength of our remote educational capability and our knowledge of First Nations community-led educational pathways, we envisage that this approach will easily adapt to meet the needs of First Nations peoples, organisations and communities across Australia, and in consultation, the needs of Indigenous peoples in other countries.

To strengthen the pathway into higher education and to meet the current gap in provision, we are in the process of acquiring self-accreditation to provide AQF levels 5 to 7 once again. Batchelor intends to offer a specialised social science degree with a maximum of three majors and be considered for university status, commencing in 2025. This would see the Institute become the first “First Nations” University in Australia delivering programs focused on interests related to improving the future for First Nations peoples and communities. This will enable a more seamless and coherent educational experience for First Nations students and provide an educational bridge between the current VET and higher education operations. It will substantiate the education and employment pathways that First Nations people around the country identify and require.

The Teaching and Learning strategy will allow us to provide a more focused and responsive engagement with students with the aim that access to culturally safe communication processes remains a constant throughout their student experience. Communication is concerned with candidates’ needs in respect to navigating the Institute’s systems, enabling access, and increasing the efficiency of our response with students to ensure that channels of communication are effective and responsive. This practice allows us to maintain accurate and culturally responsive decision making and record those processes as part of the First Nations Governance commitment of the Institute.

## Strategies for Improving Research, Research Training, and Innovation

The Institute's Higher Education and Research Division (HERD) quality and strength have grown in recent years and continue to grow. Batchelor Institute's researchers have a strong publication record, providing valuable evidence for communities, governments, researchers and community-based organisations. In 2022 for a 2023 submission, the Institute compiled its research data for submission to Excellence in Research Australia (ERA), and for the first time it reached the threshold for benchmarking standards and could be ranked as a leading institution in research excellence.

The research program has steadily increased its capacity to conduct national and Territory-wide research and evaluation projects. The focus has been on providing opportunities to engage with Indigenous people and communities to explore and find solutions to problems identified by communities, consistent with the Institute's strategic directions.

In 2023, the Institute won the largest Category 1 grant through the Australian Government's Emerging Priorities Program (EPP) receiving \$916,000. It also received its largest Category 3 grant from the Lego Foundation partnering with Johns Hopkins School of Indigenous Health for \$27.5M USD. In addition to these flagship projects, the Institute has several community or First Nations organisation (industry) commissioned research and evaluation partnership projects underway.

Key research priorities in the coming year are to build on recent significant projects with a focus on demand driven social action research, succession planning for the next generation of researchers, and strengthening language maintenance and revival. This will be measured by new grant income, including from category 1 funding (e.g. ARC), growth of teams of trained and experienced Indigenous community-based researchers, and additional languages undergoing revival.

We have created two Research Associate positions as Level A pathways to support Candidates who wish to undertake their PhD as part of a wider First Nations Research employment strategy within Batchelor Institute. This approach also continues the Institute's practice of investing in the future by growing and sustaining candidates who will continue as vibrant and vital program alumni, and growth and sustainability will be evident by the allocation of a new Research Associate position annually.

We are pursuing new opportunities to link two other Candidates through international internship partnerships with Johns Hopkins University (USA) and with Providence University (Taiwan). We expect that by initiating strong international internships we will expand the opportunities for First Nations global to local knowledge building and research excellence. Success will be measured by the number of internships taken up by HDR students.

The Graduate School exists to provide a culturally safe space for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to speak their truths, through the provision of a high-quality Higher Degree by Research (HDR) Program, intensive student support and the creation of a research community of practice. We expect enrolments in our Graduate School programs to continue increasing by at least 2 new candidates per year. We expect 3-4 completions every 2 years, knowing these numbers will change as the increased cohort progresses.

## Strategies for Engaging with Industry

Batchelor has extensive links with industry and these will be strengthened during 2024. Through the research and evaluation projects underway or recently completed, Batchelor has partnerships with University of South Australia, Charles Darwin University, Flinders University, Curtin University, University of Notre Dame Australia, Federation University, ANU and Deakin University, in addition to five Aboriginal community organisations, and 12 non-government and government partners. In development are Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with Providence University and Taipei National University of the Arts in Taiwan.

Batchelor is currently partnered with University of Tasmania and University of the Sunshine Coast under two ARC grants, one Linkage and one Discovery. Both contain scholarships for HDR students. These partnerships expand our capability significantly.

Several ARC applications will be submitted in 2024, partnering on research and evaluation to inform policy and practice in schools, and research on suicide post or prevention, among other critically important social issues.

A key priority for engaging with industry in 2024 is building connections with organisations with a focus on support for families of First Nations children 0-6 years. Batchelor has been successful in partnering with Johns Hopkins Centre for Indigenous Health (USA), First Nations Health Authority (British Columbia) and the University of Otago (Aotearoa, NZ) to implement the Family Spirit project. Locally, Batchelor has or will be entering into partnership with Children's Ground, other local providers and a provider in NSW. A major activity planned for 2024 is the partner visit to Alice Springs in August which will promote the research to Alice Springs and beyond.

MOU's and Project advisory boards provide a formal means of linking industry and stakeholders with the shared governance of research and evaluation projects. This is another way that Batchelor ensures our broad and equitable industry links are operating well and that community accountability as well as accountability to funding sources can be managed and met appropriately and retained for life of project towards sustainable impacts.

Dissemination mechanisms are another means of engaging with industry. This includes presenting at relevant conferences, and media strategies targeting particular sectors, eg the EPP related site <https://www.remoteschoolengagement.au/>.

In August 2024 Batchelor is holding a 2 day "Learning Journeys, Land and Language Symposium" to commemorate its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This symposium will see past students presenting on their learning journey at Batchelor and beyond, as well as other academics, researchers and knowledge holders whose work enlivens the symposium's themes of land and language from an educational perspective. This will also be a demonstration of Batchelor's extensive links with industry.  
[Batchelor Institute » 1974 – 2024 Learning Journeys, Land & Language Symposium](#)

SIGNED for and on behalf of  
THE COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

by

Madonna Morton

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Full name (please print)

First Assistant Secretary

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Position

of the Department of Education



Signature

29/05/2024

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Date

SIGNED for and on behalf of  
Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary  
Education

by

David Cusack

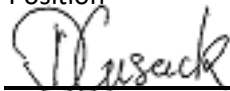
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Full name (please print)

CEO

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Position



Signature

30/04/2024

In the presence of:

Leslie Egan

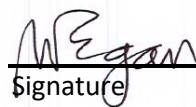
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Witness (please print)

EO to the Chair & CEO

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Position or profession of witness (please print)



Signature

30/04/2024